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Peoria City Hall
419 Fulton Street
Peoria
Peoria County
Illinois

HABS No. IL-1129

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

PEORIA CITY HALL
419 FULTON STREET
PEORIA
PEORIA COUNTY
ILLINOISSIGNIFICANCE

The Peoria City Hall was constructed in 1897 when many countries in Europe were still controlled by a landed gentry or other forms of limited electorate. The building stands as a symbol that the average citizen of the United States could be a part of his government no matter what his social or financial situation.

The design of this building was thorough, all four elevations are finished in Lake Superior sandstone. The details of this Flemish Renaissance style structure are seen in all four elevations. Reeves & Bailee, Peoria Architects, were thorough in their treatment of the Flemish Renaissance style. This can be seen in the stepped gables of the fifth floor dormer windows and in the window refinement as your eye progresses up from the First Floor to the Fourth Floor.

Inside, the rotunda is similar to ones found in civic buildings in Middle Europe but because of Midwest winters, the rotunda is covered with a roof containing a tiffany-like stained glass skylight.

The entire building has fine examples of leaded glass, carved wood, copper repousse', cast iron ornament and wall and ceiling murals. Terra cotta panels and beltlines define each floor level. Terra cotta is also found in pilaster capitals, medallions over the entrances and in arch keystones.

Designed as a City Hall, this building has served Peoria well for over 85 years. The City Hall Building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in February, 1973.

The City Hall was the site of speeches to a public gathering by Adlai Stevensen III and Edward Kennedy, both at the time were U. S. Senators on the campaign trail for Lyndon Johnson.

PART I

A-1 Date of Erection

The Peoria City Hall was erected in the fifteen months prior to dedication ceremonies which took place on January 5, 1899. The evening before the formal dedication ceremonies, City officials attended a lavish banquet at which the toasts and praise flowed freely. Newspaper reports of the dinner indicate that "its duration was only surpassed by its excellence. Perhaps never before in the history of the City has there been an event of this character so well conducted, so able managed, so successfully concluded and jollification by which the City fathers celebrated the removal from the old City Hall into the new building which will henceforth be known as their home."

The actual dedication ceremonies were conducted at 2:00 in the new Council Chambers on the afternoon of January 5. The room was crowded to overflowing with people in every doorway anxious to attend the ceremony. Mayor Warner made the principal address. He is quoted as having commented that "This is a hall superior to any in the state. Chicago has one larger and far more expensive, but gloomy and dark within, while this is lightsome, bright and cheerful in every department." Mayor Warner also recalled that the building took 15 months to erect at a cost of \$229,950.27. He was especially proud of the fact that, as much as possible, all of the work was done with Peoria labor. The electrical work was called "superior to any ever attempted in the City".

The festivities continued on into the afternoon with a parade which consisted of the Fire Department and Spencers Military Band. The new building was open for public inspection for several days, and the various departments made special efforts to make the public welcome.

On the evening of January 7, a concert was held in Council Chambers at which a new march was first heard in honor of the building. A review of the minutes of Council meetings shows no formal dedication resolution, but there were several resolutions associated with the completion of the building and the moving operations.

PART I

A-2 Architect

The Architects for the City Hall, Reeves and Bailee of Peoria, were a well known firm in the Midwest. Their projects include the Proctor Home in Peoria, Bloomington High School in Bloomington, Glen Oak Pavilion in Peoria, Stockyards in Des Moines, Iowa, Peoria State Hospital in Bartonville and many schools and commercial buildings in Peoria.

A-3 Builder, Contractor, Suppliers

William M. Allen, Contractor, built the City Hall Building for a firm bid of \$234,592.00 in 1897, completing the building in 1898. William M. Allen had been mayor of Peoria in 1895 and 1896.

The building reflects almost entirely Peoria labor and skills. The Lake Superior red sandstone was finished by inmates of the local work house which reduced the cost of the facing material for the building.

The cast iron work, staircase, railings, thresholds, etc. were all fabricated by Lucas Iron Works of Peoria. Founded in 1857, Lucas Iron Works is still in operation today.

A-4 Original Plans and Construction

The prints of the original plans and specifications are located in the City Hall Building Department files. The exterior of the building has remained the same except for the addition of a fire escape on the south elevation and the change from wood doors to aluminum anodized bronze doors at the first floor entrances.

PART I

A-5 Alterations and Additions

The City Hall Building has in recent years been well maintained and kept reasonably up to date in regard to utilities, alarm systems, and communication systems.

In 1973 a new red asbestos slate roof was installed replacing the red Vermont slate which had wore very thin through years of wear and as a consequence leaking in rainstorms. The red asbestos slate matches the Vermont slate in color and size. Original ridge caps and other roof ornaments were reused.

The copper sheathed tower was made more weatherproof and the roof skylights rebuilt and waterproofed. The built-in gutters were completely replaced in copper as before and all supporting members for the gutter and cornice were checked. A few had to be replaced.

In 1974 the old elevator was replaced and the hoistway realigned. All new fire protection devices for the elevator were also installed. A fire escape was added on the south side allowing emergency exists on all floors.

Also in 1974 new exterior anodized bronze aluminum doors were installed. These replaced the very heavy wood doors. The new lighter weight doors were easier for patrons to open. The oak frames around the doors and sidelights were stripped and refinished in natural oak and left as originally designed.

In 1975 the marble floor was replaced with new white Italian marble. The old white marble floor had become gray and scarred with use. In areas of heavy traffic the marble had become worn and uneven.

Also in this remodeling the fluorescent lights in the public lobbies were replaced and incandescent chandeliers, reproductions of the period, were installed. Gas jet lights were discovered in the fascia of the rotunda just under the railings at the floor opening. These were electrified on the first floor and thus adds to the light level in the first floor lobby.

PART I

A-5 (Cont.)

The City Hall Council Chamber was restored in 1975. The public seating area was updated with cushioned theater type seats, velvet drapes added at the arched windows and the floor carpeted.

The rolltop Council members' desks were retained but placed in a better layout which allowed for tables for staff and press. All the natural oak wood was cleaned and refinished and the plaster wall above the wainscot was covered with vinyl wall covering.

In 1979-80 the basement areas were renovated to make room for computers and additional offices. An emergency exit from the basement was constructed in the form of an outdoor stairwell on the east side.

B Historical Context

The building has been used as City Hall continuously since its construction. The bell in the tower atop the building was originally used as a fire alarm and to mark the passing of prominent Peorians. The Peoria Historical Society and the Bradley University Library are possible sources of additional information regarding persons and events connected with the structure.

PART II

A Description of the Exterior

The four floor building with 5th floor attic is approximately 100 ft. on Fulton and 115 ft. on Madison. All four elevations are fully designed. The high hipped roof has stepped dormers on three sides.

Main floor entrances from Fulton Street and Madison Street are emphasized with a deeply recessed large arch topped with a solid balustrade.

Exterior elevations of the four story building are divided into three horizontal divisions and seven bays on Fulton Street and six bays on Madison Street. The ground floor elevation is of rough finished stone with simple design windows. The second and third floors are in the less rusticated stone and here the splayed arch over the windows emphasizes the bay system. The fourth floor is of smoother stone with smaller more ornamented windows.

Its facades are well balanced and follow the rules of good proportion. The very high mansard roof has fifth floor windows set in large gables which are highly ornamented and stepped, in the tradition of middle European Renaissance design.

B Description of the Interior

As in many civic buildings of the Renaissance period, the offices and meeting rooms are arranged around a central "Hall-Court". These Hall-Courts on each floor are visually connected from floor to floor through an open central oval Gallery or Rotunda. Natural light is introduced into the Hall-Court through a stained glass skylight in the roof just over the Rotunda.

PART II
B (Cont.)

The staircase is tightly laid out and takes good advantage of the space but still keeps the character of the grand staircases of Renaissance halls. From the top it starts with two opposing short flights to landings then turns 90 degrees with a very short flight to a central landing where the stair widens into a central stair descending to the next floor. This is repeated on each floor.

Stairs and gallery railings are embellished with intricately designed cast iron which contrasts with the plain white marble floors. Many of the interior walls around the Hall-Court have large, borrowed light leaded bevel windows all done in geometric designs.

There are many pieces of art work on all floors of the building that reflect the philosophy of the art that prevailed in the late 1800's. The work is well integrated with the structure and in many cases is a functional part of the design; for example, the stained glass skylight in the ceiling over the Hall-Court. The skylight shows the influence of Tiffaney in its design and is very colorful.

The staircase running from the first through the fourth floor has a repeated interlocking excellent scroll as a design motif in wrought iron. It is capped with a naturally finished oak handrail. This same design is also found around the oval open galleries on each floor in the Hall-Courts.

The murals are found in the ceilings of the first floor and on the wall in the stairwell on the fourth floor level and in the half sphere wall found at one end of the City Council Chamber. The mural in the City Council Chamber envisions Columbia, the Mother of Republics, overseeing the actions of the democratic body meeting in the Chamber. The mural is done in the florid romantic style, all in pastel colors.

PART II

B (Cont.)

The Council Chamber has considerable amounts of oak paneling. The wainscot paneling is continuous all the way around the room. Oak Paneling is also found in the large dias-desk area at one end of the Council Chamber. The Dias-desk area has two levels. The upper level is for the mayor and his aides. The lower level is for the City Clerk and other members of the administration. Each councilman has a rolltop desk made of oak; the desks range in a semi-circle from the mayor's dias area.

C Description of the Site

The focus of the building has always been and still is toward the intersection of Madison Street and Fulton Street. ~~Appendix C is a plan for landscaping of the green area around City Hall. It was prepared in 1958 by the Peoria Park District.~~

Presently, the building is surrounded on three sides by Peoria's new Civic Center Complex. This complex is made up of three buildings connected by glass arcades. Johnson and Burgee, the Civic Center architects, were careful to consider the City Hall in their designs. The glass arcades are done in reflective glass so that the detail of City Hall will compliment and not compete with the smooth surfaces of the Civic Center.

PART III

A Architectural Drawings

The prints of the original plans and specifications are located in the City Hall Building Department files. ~~Appendix A and B show floor plans and elevations.~~

PART III (Cont.)

B Early Views

The Peoria Public Library has microfilm of Peoria area newspapers which include some of the early photographs of the City Hall.

C Bibliography

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